



*Citation for published version:*

White, A 2011, 'Polish Migration in the UK - local experiences and effects' Paper presented at AHRC Connected Communities symposium: Understanding Local Experiences and Effects of New Migration, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, 26/09/11, .

*Publication date:*  
2011

[Link to publication](#)

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AHRC Connected Communities symposium: *Understanding Local Experiences and Effects of New Migration* (Sheffield, 26th September 2011)

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**'Polish Migration in the UK - local experiences and effects'**

Poles constitute the single largest nationality within 'new' migration to the UK and their status as new UK migrants is the lens through which they will be viewed at this symposium<sup>1</sup>. However, it is worth remembering that migration scholars highlight how contemporary Polish migration illustrates *world-wide* 'novel' trends, towards increased transnationalism; temporary, circular and open-ended migration; and the participation of new types of migrant, such as more women migrating independently, or young cosmopolitans in search of adventure.<sup>2</sup> Stenning et al (2006: 3) for example wrote of A8 migrants in Newcastle and Peterborough that 'early evidence suggests they are particularly likely to be young and well-qualified people who may not settle long-term in the areas to which they first migrate. As such they perhaps represent the archetypal new migrant.'

'New' is a contested term and scholars have queried the novelty of 'new migration' globally. They argue that phenomena such as links between migrants and their home countries or temporary migration always existed, albeit on a smaller scale.<sup>3</sup> The label 'new' is especially problematic when understood to suggest that migration today is different because it is only temporary, a comforting idea for those in the receiving society who do not welcome the prospect of permanent immigration. It is surprising how many

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<sup>1</sup> 'New migration' is defined by Robinson (2010: 2451) as migration to the UK over the last 20 years - migration which is 'novel' in its scale, complexity of types, and geographical diversity.

<sup>2</sup> Favell's 'Eurostars' (Favell 2008) have their East European equivalents.

<sup>3</sup> A similar charge could be made against the label 'new' with reference to UK immigration: Berkeley et al argue (p. 35) that continuities outweigh differences and that racism in particular is an experience equally shared by 'old' and 'new' migrants.

British people are convinced that ‘the Poles have gone back’;<sup>4</sup> similarly, the UK government assumes that refugees will go back to their countries of origin once these become safe. However, as Castles and Miller demonstrate convincingly in *The Age of Migration*, temporariness cannot be assumed. There is a consistent pattern in migration over the ages which they label the ‘migration process’: a proportion of migrants always settle and bring over their relatives, however much governments of receiving countries try to prevent or ignore this happening.

Referring to the UK, the label ‘new migration’ could also be criticized for blurring distinctions between migrants with very different statuses and rights. How much do a Polish plumber and a Somali refugee have in common? In fact there is plenty of research which indicates that EU migrants are vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty, despite their privileged status.<sup>5</sup> Workplace segregation and poor English skills<sup>6</sup> stand out as particular problems for many Polish migrants – leading potentially to life-long segregation, even if their children integrate successfully into UK society.

The geographical dimension and scale of ‘new migration’ is perhaps the main reason for using the term. The dispersal of new migrants across the UK has brought Poles in particular to localities hitherto inexperienced in receiving international migrants.

Simultaneously, although Poland is a country with a rich emigration history, after 2004

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<sup>4</sup> Just as migrants often entertain a ‘myth of return’ for their own futures, so it seems that both UK and Polish media, as well as many ordinary British people, have succumbed to a collective myth of return, based on wishful thinking. See White 2011a, Chapter 10.

<sup>5</sup> Green (2007: 349), writes that ‘focus on new arrivals may be justified on the basis that refugees and labour migrants face many similar issues in access to and progression within the UK labour market’. Detailed studies of A8 migrants such as Anderson et al 2006 and Spencer et al 2007 indicate the similarity of their problems to those of other new migrants. A recent Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum publication lists current acute problems for non-EU migrants and refugees in London as: ‘insecure employment; increased risk of health problems; risk of exploitation in the private housing sector; lack of awareness of rights in the UK; feelings of social exclusion or isolation’ (Hemon et al 2011: 9).

<sup>6</sup> Recent research has uncovered quite surprising cases of occupational groups with insufficient English even though their work involves contact with English speakers. These include Polish care workers in North-West England, interviewed by Judd, who were diffident about their language and adamant that they needed training in ‘vocationally specific linguistic skills’ (Judd 2011: 198); Polish priests whose inadequate English is a major hindrance to their ability to operate as regular Catholic clergy in the UK (Grzymała-Moszczyńska et al, 2011: 227); and Polish entrepreneurs in Glasgow (Lassalle 2011). Poles in occupations which isolate them from English speakers often have little English and can find it hard to improve. See e.g. White 2011a (Chapter 8) on cleaners in Bristol and Bath and, for an extreme case, Kreft (2009:143) on Llanybydder, mid-Wales, where Poles constitute a large proportion of the local population.

migrants began arriving in the UK from Polish regions which had previously experienced little more than internal rural-urban migration.

Should Poles be taken to represent the whole East European strand within new migration? This carries a risk of perpetuating existing hierarchies. East European migrants are not equal: non-EU citizens are clearly disadvantaged, as are Romanians and Bulgarians relative to A8 migrants, because of restrictions on their right to work in the UK. There is a hierarchy even among the A8, with Poles - as by far the largest and best-established group - occupying the dominant position. To assume that Poles represent other nationalities is therefore problematic. Non-Polish East Europeans dislike it when British people assume they are Polish, and – together with Poles - resent implications that Europe east of the former Iron Curtain is a single space (poverty-stricken, grey and ‘post-communist’).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, unlike, for example, Romanians, Poles are hardly ‘new’ migrants, given the existence of a post-World War Two Polish diaspora in many UK cities as well as substantial migration to London in the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>8</sup> This could and to some extent does give them a basic social capital which other East Europeans tend to lack.

However, there are also reasons both to generalize about A10 migrants and also to treat Poles as their representatives. Firstly, to the extent that ‘integration’ constitutes moves by the receiving society, if A10 migrants are treated as a single category, they will share many integration experiences. This seems to be the starting assumption of a number of reports which focus on A8/10 migrant experiences in specific UK cities and towns.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, EU membership has led to similar mobility expectations across Eastern Europe: Parutis (2009) for example found that the young Poles and Lithuanians she studied in London had

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<sup>7</sup> Marta Kempny (2010:12), for example, complains about UK research which ‘treats Central and East European migrants as a single monolithic entity... the risk inherent in such an approach is the possibility of essentializing notions about Polish people, who are thus considered as members of the post-communist bloc’. Fox’s comparative research on Hungarian and Romanian migrants to the UK demonstrates the differences between the nationalities. For some early findings from the research see Fox et al 2010.

<sup>8</sup> The most thorough description of the post-war diaspora is Sword (1996).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Garapich and Parutis (Redbridge), Garapich (Hammersmith) Cook et al (Leeds), Glossop and Shaheen (Bristol and Hull). Markova and Black 2007, on Hackney, Harrow and Brighton&Hove, although about non-EU East Europeans, offers many insights into integration experiences which also seem to be common among EU migrants.

identical outlooks in many respects.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, there is a degree of solidarity and collaboration between different groups of East Europeans, as shown, for example, in shops which sell Polish, Lithuanian and Russian products. Finally, post-2004 Polish migrants often keep a distance from the post-war Polish diaspora and *vice versa*: the 'novelty' of the new migrants is clear to both generations.<sup>11</sup>

Reviewing the research on Poles in the UK is also a worthwhile exercise because Poles are important in their own right. After all, they number several hundred thousand people. Moreover, mapping exercises (qv. Burrell 2010, Garapich 2011) are helpful because it is not easy to form a quick impression of the literature: so much has already been written and even more is in the pipeline, including numerous PhDs (see Appendix).<sup>12</sup> The brief overview which follows will focus largely on this Polish-centred literature, most of which is qualitative and based on local studies, rather than on the reports for local authorities, etc., which usually survey A8/10 migrants more generally.

Research on UK Poles reveals a varied socio-demographic profile which is hardly surprising in a population of perhaps half a million.<sup>13</sup> The variety is important to note, since it is often suggested that Polish migrants to the UK and Ireland are overwhelmingly young and well-educated. This is not exactly a myth,<sup>14</sup> but it is not the whole picture.

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<sup>10</sup> Parutis is both Polish and Lithuanian so she was in the unusual position of being able to conduct a thorough comparison.

<sup>11</sup> Numerous researchers have commented on the gaps and differences between the two groups, while also identifying instances of collaboration and solidarity: see especially Garapich 2008; Garapich 2011a. Garapich also sees Poles who arrived in London in the years immediately preceding EU accession as a third and to some extent discrete group.

<sup>12</sup> An extensive bibliography can be found on the Polish Migration Website, <http://www.bath.ac.uk/polis/networks/polish-migration/publications/>. See Burrell 2010 and Garapich in 2011a for recent literature surveys.

<sup>13</sup> The most influential typology has been Eade et al's 2006 categorization according to proposed duration of stay ('searchers': unclear plans; 'hamsters': save up and return quickly; 'storks': seasonal migrants; 'salmon': long-term in UK but may return to retire). Other researchers have applied Berry's four acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization); see e.g. Grzymała-Moszczyńska et al 2011, White 2011a. There is a tendency to draw sharp distinctions between migrants with different levels of education (e.g. Fomina 2009). Attempting to distance ourselves from the oversimplifications which can ensue from rigid typologies, Louise Ryan and I distinguish between the vaguer categories of more and less 'confident' migrants (White and Ryan 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Polish statistical evidence shows that they are young and highly educated compared to the overall Polish population and to Polish migrants to other countries.

Three-quarters are not university graduates,<sup>15</sup> many have poor language skills<sup>16</sup> and they include sub-groups such as homeless people<sup>17</sup> and Roma<sup>18</sup> who are often marginalized.

Poles themselves frequently comment on fragmentation within the Polish migrant 'community',<sup>19</sup> although there is some residual sense that such a community should and perhaps in some ways does exist. The Polish diaspora – to use another contested term - is characterized by class boundaries, divisions between different migrant cohorts, and simple lack of contact between small kin and friendship clusters. There is distance between these groups, but also distrust<sup>20</sup> and a discourse of hostility (Eade et al 2006: 14) which has been identified as a handicap – though not an insuperable one - to forming community organisations.<sup>21</sup> Since many Poles are not linked to Polish community organizations, but doing integration their own way, this presents certain challenges to the receiving society and local authorities who would like to be able to liaise with community groups in their efforts to reach out and help Polish migrants.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, it perhaps also absolves them of certain responsibilities.<sup>23</sup>

Research suggests that Poles display a wide range of acculturation strategies and will/capacity to build networks in UK neighbourhoods: in fact, their different attitudes towards integration is one of the main factors dividing them. For example, in her study of

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<sup>15</sup> Fihel and Kaczmarczyk, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> Including many young people, even though they studied English at school. Many young Poles have only limited opportunities in the UK. See White 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Garapich 2011b.

<sup>18</sup> Staniewicz 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Gill (2010, p. 1165) asserts that 'There is consensus [among recent researchers]... that Poles are not cohesive and that homogenising notions of 'diaspora' and 'community' are particularly misplaced when discussing this group.'

<sup>20</sup> Ryan et al 2008, Fomina p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> See Pietka, for example, for discussion of the paradoxes of 'Polish community' in Glasgow; and similar discussion of Bath and Bristol in White 2011a, Ch. 9.

<sup>22</sup> A frustration vividly expressed to me by a communities advocate from the Bath police force who was having problems locating the 'Polish community' she was supposed to serve.

<sup>23</sup> See Osipovič for discussion of how/why some Poles are reluctant to take up entitlements. The apparently high level of embarrassment among Poles about fellow Poles and concern about their collective image is fed by the Polish media in both the UK and Poland which regularly reports on negative accounts of Poles in the British media, e.g. concerning the number of Poles convicted of crimes in the UK. Cook et al's recommendation (p. 48) that Leeds City Council 'should take a lead role in developing a myth-busting exercise' about migrants (as in Barcelona or Glasgow) seems helpful in view of these apparently acute worries about how Poles are viewed by non-Poles.

Poles in Bradford, Fomina (2009: 1) asserts the existence of three 'parallel worlds': those inhabited by English-speaking newly-arrived Poles who feel Polish but distance themselves socially from other Polish migrants; 'less resourceful' (*mniej zaradni*) recently-arrived Poles who associate mainly with co-ethnics; and the post-war generation.<sup>24</sup> A significant strand of research has focused on the different social capital of different groups of Poles and their strong and weak ties with the non-Polish community.<sup>25</sup>

A particular area of interest is how Poles respond to diversity and divisions within local neighbourhoods. Kempny's book on Poles in Belfast, for example, illustrates a range of attitudes to sectarian divides in Northern Ireland. Some interviewees were convinced of their vulnerability as Catholics and terrified of local Protestants. Other interviewees were much more upbeat and believed that new migration in Belfast had diffused tension and contributed to the growth of a more tolerant local society.<sup>26</sup> Several studies have focused on Polish attitudes towards racial diversity in British cities, for example Eade et al; Parutis; Ryan et al; and Trevena in London; Fomina in Bradford; and Temple in the Manchester area. Although most writers comment on the fact that incoming Poles are amazed by the ethnic diversity of UK cities – so different from the ethnic homogeneity of post-World War II Poland – the studies illustrate a range of Polish attitudes, from racism to enthusiastic immersion in multicultural activities. Garapich and Parutis (on the London Borough of Redbridge, p. 11) distinguish between rhetoric and practice among A10 migrants:

Many respondents tend to see community cohesion and diversity in strongly racialised terms with ethnic and cultural plurality reduced to categories of 'black' and 'white'. A significant number of people expressed overtly racist remarks [but]... the lived and practised diversity shows that the majority of our respondents socialise with and do not have a problem in trusting people from other nationalities. Ninety five per cent state that they have a friend from their own ethnic group, 53% have British friends and 61% have friends from other nationalities.

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<sup>24</sup> The more educated Poles in her sample were often less than complimentary about the second group. For a similar account of snobbism in Dublin, see Bobek and Salamonska 2009.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Gill and Bialski 2011, Ryan et al 2008, White and Ryan 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Svašek 2009, also on Belfast.

There is less research into the experiences of Poles living in largely white communities. An exception is the projects conducted by the Universities of Southampton (Vigers et al 2009) and Glamorgan (Kreft 2009) in Carmarthenshire. It should not be assumed that Poles face more prejudice and hostility from the local population in such places – according to Kreft, relations in Carmarthen seem particularly harmonious – but comparisons between the three sites (Llanelli, Carmarthen and Llanybydder) bring out the actual complexities of local developments, with different sorts of Polish population and different local economies even in neighbouring small towns.

The Catholic Church might seem an ideal facilitator of Polish integration: the arrival of so many Polish churchgoers and even priests in the UK has contributed to a Catholic revival which might be a win-win situation for both immigrants and existing local congregations. Several recent studies undermine this view, suggesting that, once in the UK, many Poles distance themselves from organised Catholicism (Gill, Krotofil) and that Polish priests can sometimes encourage separatism rather than integration. Trzebiatowska, for example, writing about Aberdeen, shows a complete mismatch of expectations between Scottish and Polish clergy. Scottish Catholic priests see Catholicism as universal (one of approximately 41 religions on offer in Aberdeen) whereas the incoming Polish priests have a narrowly ethnic agenda: they ‘wish to preserve and strengthen Polish Catholicism’ (pp. 1067, 1063). Trzebiatowska comments that unlike Muslim religious organisations in the UK, ‘In the case of the Catholic Church integration strategies remain entirely under the jurisdiction of religious leaders, with no interference or guidance from the state’ (p. 1069).

Unfortunately I have no time to survey the many other dimensions and sites of integration explored by UK-based researchers, such as employment,<sup>27</sup> schools,<sup>28</sup> housing,<sup>29</sup> shopping,<sup>30</sup> health,<sup>31</sup> welfare benefits,<sup>32</sup> language,<sup>33</sup> how migrants choose

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<sup>27</sup> Research has tended to focus separately on different occupational groups. See e.g. Datta 2008 on builders in London; Janta et al 2011 on hospitality workers in Bournemouth; Kilkey 2009 on handymen in London; Lassalle 2011 on entrepreneurs in Glasgow; Thompson 2010 on factory workers in Llanelli. (The last paper is particularly interesting for its insights into the difficulty for some migrants of breaking into the regular labour market, away from agency work, inhibiting their integration and settlement).

<sup>28</sup> E.g. D’Angelo and Ryan 2011 (London); Moskal 2010 (Scotland).

<sup>29</sup> Robinson et al 2007 (Sheffield).



where to go in the UK,<sup>34</sup> place-making<sup>35</sup> and settlement intentions.<sup>36</sup> There is also a considerable body of research conducted by scholars in Poland, although this research has slightly different preoccupations, being less concerned with integration issues, and most focused on the scale of migration; the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants; impacts on sending communities; and issues around settlement and return.<sup>37</sup> The latter is probably the most significant area of overlap between the British and Polish research.

### **Conclusions: Place specificity in Polish migration research**

Stenning and Dawley, in an article about A8 migration to North-East England published in 2009, suggested that ‘there is a “missing” local and regional scale in studies of [A8] migration’ (p. 273). This is not so true by 2011, since there have been a number of reports produced for local authorities and other official agencies which do assess the nature and impact of A8 migration on a local scale. These have employed a range of methodologies, from Garapich and Parutis’s anthropological approach in Redbridge, Lewisham and Hammersmith to the entirely statistical analyses of Hull and Bristol in the CentreforCities report (Glossop and Shaheen 2009).

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<sup>30</sup> Rabikowska and Burrell 2009 (London and Leicester).

<sup>31</sup> Collis et al 2010 (Thetford and the East of England), Cook et al 2008 (Leeds).

<sup>32</sup> Osipovič 2010 (London).

<sup>33</sup> Vigers et al 2009 (Mid-Wales);, Temple 2010 (Manchester area).

<sup>34</sup> Rather than choosing between UK locations on the basis of research into their specific characteristics, Poles seem most often go where they have an opportunity (through friends, family or a recruitment agency/specific employer) (Kreft 2009, White 2011a; White and Ryan 2008 Robinson et al 2007: 55). Even Poles in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland have often not deliberately chosen these areas over England. See e.g. Lassalle et al 2011, p. 165. However, there is also evidence that they are influenced in their choice by the size of location, e.g. preferring a small town over a big city. See White 2011b.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Gill 2010, White 2011b.

<sup>36</sup> Because migrants so often find it hard to answer the question of how long they will stay, and because it is objectively unknowable, in my own research I have preferred to concentrate on the issue of what factors shape Poles’ decision making about how long to stay. The conclusion of my research on families was that there were many reasons for them to stay. There seems to be increasing evidence of settlement intentions (see e.g. Garapich and Parutis 2009 on Redbridge as well as other studies by Garapich).

<sup>37</sup> Decisions about duration of stay, settlement and return are of course intimately linked to integration experiences but I have no space to dwell on them here. See White 2011a, Chapters 8-10. It is significant that UK media reports on return often quote Polish scholars – especially Krystyna Iglicka – and that the influential IPPR report (Pollard et al 2008) was partly based on research conducted in Poland.

With regard to qualitative research published in academic books and journals, as well as unpublished PhDs, it would probably be true to say that there is more research about 'experiences' than 'effects', but here too there is an overwhelmingly local rather than national focus.<sup>38</sup> London was the site of two influential early ESRC-funded projects (Eade et al 2006, Ryan et al 2007) and continues to attract attention,<sup>39</sup> but there is also a growing body of non-London based research.

However, despite the local data and the ostensible concern with place, the specificities of particular locations are often only sketched out rather than presented in detail (and some are anonymised). Although anthropologists and geographers are well-represented among Polish migration researchers, description of local areas is often fairly minimal in the publications,<sup>40</sup> although perhaps more substantial in the PhDs on which some of the research is based and where there is more space for what might be deemed 'background' information. Rather few qualitative studies compare different locations and therefore highlight their special features. Exceptions are Kreft 2006 on Carmarthenshire; Stenning et al 2006 on Peterborough and Newcastle – which is partly quantitative; and my own research into Bath, Bristol and Trowbridge. The sociological studies are generally careful to include key informants as well as migrants, and therefore to present the views of representatives of the receiving society; nonetheless, migrant experiences tend to be the main centre of attention. A missing component is often the viewpoints of 'ordinary' non-Polish people about their Polish neighbours. The Leeds study by Cook et al is refreshingly different in this respect, especially since it distinguishes between different groups of 'old' migrants, as well including the views of key informants.

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<sup>38</sup> Studies with a national focus, based on questionnaires, include Anderson et al (on employment) and Goodwin and Goodwin (on acculturation). Moszczynski 2009 is a useful mapping exercise of hate crime incidents.

<sup>39</sup> Cf Burrell 2010, p. 203.

<sup>40</sup> Since I feel this is very important, in my own research I adopt a livelihood strategy approach borrowed from development studies to attempt to understand how it feels to live in different locations, concentrating in particular on how people view their economic prospects. However, in my book (White 2011a) I found it much easier to do this for the small towns I researched in Poland than for the cities of Bath and Bristol: cities are so complex and consist of so many different neighbourhoods that it is almost impossible to generalise.

Well-funded projects which include in-depth interviews with a sufficiently large sample of Poles *and* members of other minorities *and* the majority population *and* key informants on a wide range of integration issues are clearly as exceptional as they are desirable. A dream research project would also include a thorough description of the location or (preferably) a comparative study of the locations where the interviews were conducted, including both migrants and residents' perceptions and discourse about the local area and community relations.

In the absence of such wide-ranging studies, it is nonetheless possible to piece together quite a lot of information about Poles in various UK localities, although the fact that most studies focus only on certain dimensions of integration mean that it is hard to compare like with like across different locations. For example, Trzebiatowska has told us plenty about the Polish Catholic Church in Aberdeen, but there are no similar studies in most UK cities. On the whole, it is probably helpful that so much of the research has been conducted by Poles themselves and therefore represents an insiders' view, since this is by no means to be taken for granted in migration research. On the other hand, non-Polish East European migrants can justly feel that they are crowded out of the picture.

### **Appendix: List of current UK PhD research on Polish migrants**

(from the Polish Migration Website, <http://www.bath.ac.uk/polis/networks/polish-migration/profiles/>)

Katherine Botterill: Links between spatial and social mobility among young Polish people in Edinburgh and Kraków.

Kirstie Bowden: 'Polish identity in rural England' (South-West)

Linda Cadier: 'The impact of translocality on the linguistic and cultural practices of migrant communities: the case of medical interpreters in Southampton'

Rachel Clements: Polish migrant parents in Newcastle

Alex Collis: mental health and migration (probably East Anglia)

Julia Halej: Perceptions of East European Migrants in the UK: the Impact of a Discourse on Social Reality

Agnieszka Ignatowicz: Transnational practices and gender (Midlands)

Olga Kozłowska: 'Lived experience of economic migration in the narratives of migrants from post-communist Poland to Britain'

Paul Lassalle: Polish Entrepreneurs in Scotland

Magda Lopez-Rodriguez: perspectives of Polish migrant mothers on their children's education in the UK (London)

Helen Lowther: the relationship between social capital and integration for post-accession Polish migrants living in the North East of England

Joanna Marczak: 'fertility intentions of Polish people in the UK and Poland'

Paula Pustulka: motherhood of Polish migrants living in the United Kingdom and Germany in a comparative perspective

Lucy Ramasawmy: the experiences of Polish families who have come to Scotland since 2004, exploring the factors that are important in their decisions to stay or return

Agnieszka Rydzik: the impacts of advertising and media representations of Accession 8 (A8) female migrants on their employment experiences in the UK hospitality sector

Chloe Sharp: the perceived relationship between giving gifts, social capital, helping others, religion and organ donation [among Poles in Luton]

Agnieszka Szewczyk 'Young highly qualified Polish migrants in the UK - issues of integration, identity and employment'.

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